

PUBLIC HEALTH COUNCIL

Meeting of the Public Health Council, Tuesday, July 24, 2001, 10:00 a.m., Massachusetts Department of Public Health, 250 Washington Street, Boston, Massachusetts. Public Health Council Members present were: Dr. Howard Koh (Chairman), Ms. Phyllis Cudmore, Mr. Albert Sherman, Ms. Janet Slemenda, and Dr. Thomas Sterne; Mr. Manthala George, Jr., Ms. Shane Kearney Masaschi, and Mr. Benjamin Rubin absent (one vacancy). Also in attendance as Acting General Counsel was Howard Saxner.

Chairman Koh announced that notices of the meeting had been filed with the Secretary of the Commonwealth and the Executive Office of Administration and Finance, in accordance with the Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 30A, Section 11A 1/2. In addition, Dr. Koh announced that the docket has been revised to include a staff presentation entitled, "A Public Health Response to Mercury in Fish" by Suzanne Condon, Assistant Commissioner, Elaine Krueger, Director, Environmental Toxicology Program, and Julie Watts, Director, Environmental Education Program, Bureau of Environmental Health Assessment.

The following members of the staff appeared before the Council to discuss and advise on matters pertaining to their particular interests: Suzanne Condon, Assistant Commissioner, Elaine Krueger, Director, Environmental Toxicology Program, and Julie Watts, Director, Environmental Education Program, Bureau of Environmental Health Assessment.

RECORDS OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH COUNCIL MEETINGS OF MARCH 27, 2001, APRIL 24, 2001 AND MAY 29, 2001:

Records of the Public Health Council meetings of March 27, 2001, April 24, 2001 and May 29, 2001 were presented. After consideration, upon motion made and duly seconded, it was voted unanimously: That, records of the Public Health Council Meetings of March 27, 2001, April 24, 2001 and May 29, 2001, copies of which were sent to the Council Members for their prior consideration, be approved, in accordance with Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 30A, Section 11A 1/2.

PERSONNEL ACTIONS:

In a letter dated July 9, 2001, Blake M. Molleur, Executive Director, Western Massachusetts Hospital, Westfield, recommended approval of a reappointment of a physician (Paul Haley, M.D.) to the consulting medical staff of Western Massachusetts Hospital. Supporting documentation of the appointee's qualifications accompanied the recommendation. After consideration of the appointee's qualifications, upon motion made and duly seconded, it was voted (unanimously): That, in accordance with the recommendation of the Executive Director of Western Massachusetts Hospital, under the authority of the Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 17, Section 6, the reappointment of a physician to the consulting medical staff of Western Massachusetts Hospital be approved as follows:

<u>REAPPOINTMENT</u>	<u>STATUS/SPECIALTY</u>	<u>MEDICAL LICENSE NO.</u>
Paul Haley, M.D.	Consultant Psychiatry	81763

In a letter dated July 9, 2001, Paul D. Romary, Executive Director, Lemuel Shattuck Hospital, Jamaica Plain, recommended approval of the appointments and reappointments to the medical and allied health staffs of Lemuel Shattuck Hospital. Supporting documentation of the appointees' qualifications accompanied the recommendation. After consideration of the appointees' qualifications, upon motion made and duly seconded, it was voted (unanimously): That, in accordance with the recommendation of the Executive Director of Lemuel Shattuck Hospital, under the authority of the Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 17, Section 6, the appointments and reappointments to the medical and allied health staffs of Lemuel Shattuck Hospital be approved as follows:

<u>APPOINTMENTS</u>	<u>STATUS/SPECIALTY</u>	<u>MEDICAL LICENSE NO.</u>
Peter Barrett, M.D.	Consultant Radiology	31530
Bradford D. Bobrin, M.D.	Consultant Psychiatry	158660
Salin Dahlben, M.D.	Consultant Psychiatry	45299
Astride Desrosiers, M.D.	Psychiatry Consultant	78424
Dennis Fitzsimmons, M.D.	Psychiatry Consultant	160316
Jennifer Fyler, M.D.	Psychiatry Consultant	202631
Jesse A. Goodman, M.D.	Psychiatry Consultant	160625
Dan Ioanitescu, M.D.	Psychiatry Consultant	209101

**PHYSICIAN
REAPPOINTMENTS**

STATUS/SPECIALTY

MEDICAL LICENSE NO.

Sami Erbay, M.D.	Radiology Consultant	152649
Daniel Matloff, M.D.	Gastroenterology Consultant	40154
George Whitelaw, M.D.	Orthopedics Consultant	64608

**ALLIED HEALTH
PROFESSIONAL
REAPPOINTMENT**

SPECIALTY

MEDICAL LICENSE NO.

David A. Gansler, PhD	Allied Health Professional	4912
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STAFF PRESENTATION:

“A PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE TO MERCURY IN FISH”, By Suzanne Condon, Assistant Commissioner, Elaine Krueger, Director, Environmental Toxicology Division, and Julie Watts, Director, Environmental Education Program, Bureau of Environmental Health Assessment:

Assistant Commissioner Condon made the presentation to the Council. She gave a brief introduction to the issue of mercury in fish in Massachusetts and early public health intervention efforts, described the issuance of the 1994 Statewide Advisory targeting pregnant women in Massachusetts and gave a brief discussion of increasing pollution and health effects related to mercury exposure, including the Mass. Mercury Reduction Plan. She said, “...The story of mercury in fish contamination and public health concerns in Massachusetts really date back to the mid 1980s. In 1986, there were fish testing results that came to our department basically demonstrating very high mercury levels in fish taken from the Sudbury River. In response to those test results, we issued a fish advisory, warning all of the folks who lived in that area to really avoid eating fish from the Sudbury River due to mercury contamination.”

Ms. Condon continued, “At that time, we really felt strongly that the contamination was probably related to what has been known for decades now as the Nyanza Superfund Site. It is a National Priority List Hazardous Waste Site in Massachusetts. It had reached federal status in the early 1980s and mercury was one of the primary contaminants of concern at that site... Since that time we have learned quite a bit more, by the 1990s particularly, when some of the routine fish testing results that became available showed that even Walden Pond had fish that demonstrated very high mercury levels. Clearly, Walden Pond is in a very pristine area. It is not nearby any large sources of environmental contamination, certainly not mercury; and, for that reason, we began to feel strongly that at least some of the mercury contamination had to have resulted from atmospheric deposition of industries across the country, not only here in

Massachusetts but particularly in the Midwest. At that time, Commissioner Mulligan helped us to announce an advisory, basically warning pregnant women in Massachusetts not to consume any fish caught in fresh water bodies in Massachusetts. We, as a health department continue to recognize the benefits of fish consumption for the general population, but we wanted to specifically advise pregnant women to avoid fish caught in fresh waters. We worked closely with the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, who reminded us all stocked fish in Massachusetts water bodies are still safe to eat. As we received more information, more and more human health studies and laboratory animal studies suggested that we needed to think about what other target populations beyond pregnant women we really needed to focus on. Some of the bigger studies that have been done on humans, the most recent that suggested very serious concerns over health effects, were in the Faroe Islands. These studies were done looking at low dose exposure to mercury. In other words, these were not people who frequently consumed massive amounts of fish that were very heavily contaminated but rather sporadic consumption. And for that reason, we looked at the health effects data that came out of that study, and others, which basically supported previous laboratory animal studies, and the health concerns that really were focused on related to IQ deficits, delays in developmental abilities, impaired motor function, attention deficits and behavioral problems, and importantly, decreased visual and spacial performance. That information, coupled with the continuing efforts of our interagency committee on fish toxins monitoring health effects basically caused us to look more carefully at the information that we had on a statewide basis. You will see that of all of the water bodies that have been tested, approximately sixty-four of these water bodies had fish mercury levels above the Massachusetts action levels. Approximately twenty-four of the twenty-six water bodies that had been tested in the Merrimack Valley demonstrated higher levels and had specific advisories issued for those water bodies. Based on this information and the information from the previous studies in the Faroe Islands and laboratory animal studies, we decided to enhance our efforts at outreach and education in the Merrimack Valley. We are focusing our efforts on subsistence fishers, people who really have to catch fish from these water bodies as part of their dietary program profile on a daily, weekly basis. We are working together with community health centers, hospitals in the area, physicians, nurses and health educators at trying to get the message out...”

Ms. Condon said further, “We have conducted focus group meetings with immigrant and minority residents throughout the Merrimack Valley, largely trying to elicit information from folks so that we can better understand what those barriers might be as we try to get folks in these areas to really think about what the hazards might be as a result of fish consumption for sensitive populations. Lastly, but certainly not of any less importance, is our continued partnership with the local health departments in Massachusetts trying to get these educational materials out to the right folks.”

“The expanded fish advisory”, stated Ms. Condon, “that we are issuing today takes our 1994 advisory that was originally targeted only at pregnant women, warning them not to consume any fresh water fish obtained in Massachusetts fresh waters, and we add to that sensitive population women of childbearing age, nursing mothers and children under twelve. In addition, our expanded advisory will include certain marine species for mercury. The federal government issued an advisory several months ago that included four species: shark, swordfish, king

mackerel, and tilefish. Our advisory today includes those plus tuna steak on that list of species for sensitive populations to avoid. We are offering advice on canned tuna. White canned tuna had nearly twice the levels of mercury as the pinker, chunk light tuna and so we are trying to make consumers aware of the differences that the test results have shown.” She said the safer fish to eat are cod, haddock, flounder and pollock.

In closing, Ms. Condon noted, “The focus here is to try to make people aware of all of the information that we have and empower them to help make healthy decisions for their families.”

In response to a question from Chairman Koh, Ms. Watts added, “The subsistence fishers that we have been working within the Merrimack Valley are mostly Asian immigrants who, because of culture, tradition, and other reasons, some socioeconomic, tend to eat fish mostly as their main source of protein. In addition they sell the fish to other people in their community. We have been working with people at the Lowell Community Center – they are the health educators and physicians and we had meetings with them explaining the problem. We have had some suggestions from them on how to reach populations. They have looked at our outreach materials. We are working very closely with the leaders in that community.”

Chairman Koh added that Lowell has the second largest Cambodian population in the United States, after Long Beach, California. It was further noted that the educational materials are available in five different languages. Council Member Cudmore asked, “Do we understand why mercury levels are rising?” Ms. Condon replied that she thinks the reason is industrial emissions from our older power plants.

NO VOTE/INFORMATION ONLY

The meeting adjourned at 10:30 a.m.

Howard K. Koh, M.D., M.P.H.
Chairman

LMH/lmh